

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION...

Challenge

Fort Wayne, Indiana is located at the confluence of the St. Joseph and St. Mary's Rivers. In January 2005 much of the state, including Fort Wayne, experienced massive flooding. The Allen County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated to coordinate relief and response efforts. This included notifying residents who were at risk from the flood waters.

Action

Allen County's GIS includes data on floodzones, addresses, roads and aerial photography, among others. What it didn't include was contact information for the city's most vulnerable residents - those with physical or mental disabilities who would need help evacuating. That information was provided on the spot by a group of volunteers who had been collecting it for the past 18 months. The Volunteer Center had started building a database after a police officer commented how useful that information would be during an emergency. When they approached EOC staff, the volunteers wanted to know if the locations in their database could be shown on a map. Within half an hour, the information was added to the GIS, at-risk residents living in or near flood zones were identified and resources allocated to notify them.



Fort Wayne has a history of fighting flood waters. With a county GIS in place, that battle just got a little easier.

Results

- In all, 88 at-risk residents or their caregivers were contacted before flood waters had risen, giving them time to prepare for an evacuation.
- The County GIS was able to prevent emergencies rather than simply respond to them, acting rather than reacting to the situation.
- The speed with which the GIS produced workable maps gave managers time to more efficiently allocate emergency resources.
- The cooperation between the County GIS and the Volunteer Center continues as project Safe@Home. Volunteers continue collecting and updating contact information and the EOC maintains the database with updates they provide.